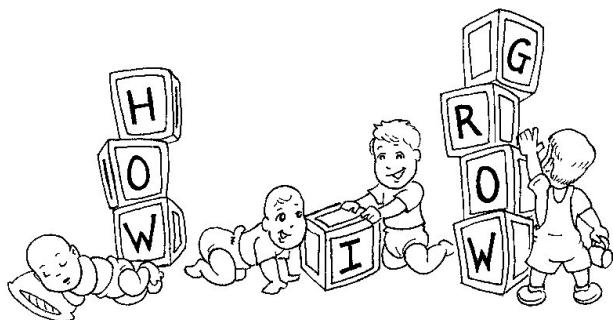


How I Grow: Months Nine and Ten¹

Millie Ferrer, and Anne M. Fugate²



Months nine and ten mark an exciting spurt in your baby's development. This "growth spurt" is fueled by her great curiosity. She wants to look at, feel, taste, and move everything. Because she wants to explore, she is learning how to get around. That way she can get into, under, and on top of things! Your baby's curiosity is necessary and wonderful. It is the foundation of a lifetime of learning. As much as ever, your baby needs you to encourage and nurture her curiosity. At this stage of her development, that means letting her have as much freedom to explore her environment as possible.

Avoid putting your baby in a playpen for long periods of time. Even when your baby has interesting toys, being in a playpen for a long time holds back her curiosity and independence. Instead, baby proof your house and let her travel around in safety. Move breakable objects, houseplants, and dangerous substances out of

reach. Cover electrical outlets. Put safety latches on cabinets. If necessary, rearrange furniture or put up a child gate to keep her out of a particular room or away from stairs.

At the same time that your baby is changing, so is your role as a parent. It is becoming more complex. As your baby begins to explore actively and develop independence, she will test limits. She will test the limits of where she can go, what she can play with, and how she can behave with others. To keep her safe and prevent her from being spoiled, you will need to set and enforce limits. By giving your baby freedom to explore and providing safe, reasonable limits, you will help her develop physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually.

Physical Development

During months nine and ten, babies are delighted with their ability to move themselves. Now they can explore their environment on their own. They do not have to wait for a parent to bring things to them. Babies this age will practice their physical skills over and over.

Your baby is probably already crawling and pulling himself up to a standing position. If not, he will be soon. Help him practice. Encourage

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him to crawl to you and to pull up on your fingers. When your baby first learns to stand, he may not be able to get down. Take the time to teach him how to sit down again safely. Otherwise, he may learn to cry for you to rescue him.

Once your baby can stand steadily, he will begin to cruise around the room by holding onto furniture. He enjoys being able to look around the room from a higher viewpoint and to touch things he could not reach before. Just make sure he cannot pull on anything, such as a tablecloth or electrical cord, which will give way or pull something down on him.

At the end of these months, your baby may even begin to climb on things, such as stairs or a low footstool. Once babies discover they can climb, they love to. When your baby first learns to climb, he will not be able to get back down. Teach him how to safely, feet first. Climbing stairs is fun exercise for your baby when you can watch him. At other times, continue to keep stairs off limits. Your baby will also enjoy climbing on you as you sit or lay on the floor.

Babies this age love to play during bath time. They can sit well on their own. They can lean forward and turn sideways without losing their balance. As your baby splashes in the bath and reaches for toys, he strengthens his muscles and improves his balance further. Enjoy this wet playtime with your baby. Just stay with him the whole time. Do not leave your baby unattended in a bath for any reason.

Along with the large muscles, your baby is gaining greater control of his small muscles, too. You can help him practice small muscle movements through games. For example, your baby will enjoy filling and emptying containers. Let him fill and empty cups of water during bath time or scoop cups of dry cereal from a big bowl. Let him take the plastic containers out of a low kitchen drawer or empty a basket of toys. Your baby will also enjoy stacking things, such as boxes, plastic bowls, or large blocks, and making pop-up toys with simple levers work.

Your baby's control of his hands and fingers continues to improve. He uses his fingers to explore objects and pokes them into holes. During mealtimes, you may have noticed your baby wanting to get involved in feeding himself. This is a great time to let him practice using his hands and fingers. Give him finger foods, a spoon, and an unbreakable cup. When you feed him, also let him try to feed himself. He will be messy, but be patient. Not only is he practicing important motor skills, but he is also taking an important step towards independence.



Social Development

During these months, your baby loves to interact with you and other people she knows. Your baby may be shy or anxious around strangers, but with reassurance, she may interact with them, too. She loves to play imitation games, trying to copy other people's sounds and movements. Make a variety of sounds and movements, such as smacking lips, "raspberries," clapping, and waving bye-bye, and encourage her to try them. Also teach her how to stick out her tongue and say "ahhh," which will come in handy during doctor visits.



Your baby enjoys performing for you when you clap and smile. The more you encourage her, the more she will try to do things. Your approval for her accomplishments is becoming important to her. As she practices all the skills she is learning, praise her often.

As much as your baby likes interacting with you and performing for you, sometimes she will not be in the mood. Take your cues from your baby. Respect her need for some down time.

As your baby tests her abilities, she will also begin to test your limits. For example, she may try to pull your hair or tip over the trashcan, almost expecting to hear “no” or “stop.” At these moments, it is crucial to use kind but firm discipline with her. Follow these guidelines in disciplining your baby:

- **As much as possible, try to prevent problems.** Move all valuable or unsafe objects out of reach so that you do not have to constantly say “no” or “don’t touch”. Give your baby the freedom to explore safely.
- **Redirect your baby’s attention from what you do not want her to do to something else.** You can redirect her attention with another object or by moving her to another location.
- **Ignore what is annoying but not harmful,** such as pulling socks out of a drawer.
- **Be consistent and follow through on what you say.** Even when she cries, stick with your limits.
- **Be kind, gentle, and patient.** Remember, your baby wants your attention and approval. Keep showing him what you want him to do, and encourage him with smiles, hugs, and praise..
- **Use kind but firm guidance, because you want to avoid spoiling your baby.** You want her to know that she is special and loved, but you also want her to know that she cannot have everything her own way.

Emotional Development

Nine- and ten-month-old babies can be cheerful and enthusiastic, and they can also be moody and easily upset. They are sensitive to others’ feelings, and may even cry if another baby is crying. Your baby will show you a lot of affection. He will kiss and hug you without being asked. He will also show you stubbornness and anger if he cannot get his way.

If your baby has a tantrum, because he cannot get his way, make sure he is safe and then ignore his screaming. Be kind and gentle, but do not give in.

Your baby may become afraid of things he was not afraid of before, such as the loud noise of the vacuum cleaner or the height of a stair he used to climb on and off of. Comfort your child and give him time to deal with his feelings. For example, let him investigate the vacuum cleaner when it is turned off.

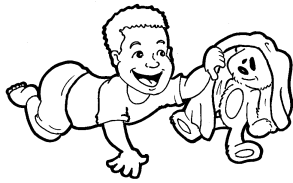


Your baby may be anxious about separation from you. He may cry when you leave, even if you leave him with someone he knows. He may even wake up at night and call for you. When you leave him, especially if you leave him in a new place or with a new person, give him a little time to get to know the situation. Try to interest him in the fascinating things in the new environment. When he is busy, kiss him, and leave quietly.

Intellectual Development

Motivated by her great curiosity, your baby spends a lot of time investigating and exploring. She will stare at an object, touch it, mouth it, bang it on the floor, and stare at it some more. She likes to fill, empty, and refill containers. She may show interest in hinged objects that she can open and close repeatedly, such as cabinet doors, pop-up toys, or stiff cardboard books. Encourage your baby’s curiosity. Let her explore safe objects and spaces, even when it results in a messy house. (Maybe you can make a game of putting the plastic bowls back in the kitchen cabinet.) Show enthusiasm about her discoveries.

During these months, you can see that your baby's short-term memory is growing. She can remember a game or person from the day before. She knows which toys are hers and has some favorites. With her growing memory, she continues to master the concept of object permanence. That is, she realizes that things continue to exist even if they are out of her sight. She may be able to look for a toy that is completely hidden if she sees you cover it. Play search games with her. While your baby watches, hide a toy under a blanket, behind a pillow, or in a purse and encourage her to find it.



With her new physical and intellectual abilities, your baby will enjoy solving simple problems. At first you might show her an interesting toy but put something else between her and it. To reach the toy, she has to move the other object out of the way. Later you might also cover the toy, so that she has to move another object out of the way and uncover the toy. Around the age of ten months, your baby might enjoy discovering which hand a toy is in or which cup a toy is under.

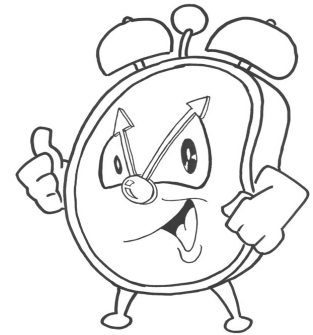
Your baby's language ability is steadily increasing. She probably shows that she understands a few words. That is, she consistently responds to a few words, such as her name, "bottle," "no," or "ball". She may even be able to do simple things when you ask her, such as "wave bye-bye" or "get your ball". To help your baby understand language, keep talking to her about what you both are doing. Point to objects and name them. Read books to her, preferably books with big pictures of familiar objects. Play mimic games with her. Show her how to do something, such as wave bye-bye or blow a kiss. Encourage her to copy you and praise her when she does.

Your baby babbles frequently, especially with your encouragement, and her babbling is beginning to sound more like words. She may even say a few words, such as "mama" or "dada". Babies usually say their first words

between eight and fifteen months. At this point, it is not important whether your baby has said her first word. What is important is the amount of babbling and noisemaking she does. Keep playing dialogue games with her. Make a noise or say a word and encourage her to respond. She enjoys "talking" to you.

Parent Time

As you have entered each phase of your child's development, you have probably discovered that parenting is a joyful and rewarding job but, at the same time, it can be demanding. You want to do the best job possible, but sometimes you struggle with self-doubt. This is natural. The mere fact that you are struggling with self-doubt shows that you genuinely love and care for your baby. Remember, no one is perfect.



A baby can bring lots of joy, but also lots of frustration. Your flexibility, patience, and understanding will be tested more as your infant continues to master different developmental skills. Perhaps you will shed a few tears of frustration when your baby seems fussy or stubborn or has temper tantrums. Go ahead and cry. Tears cleanse and help release stress. A good cry will make you feel better and calm your spirit.

When you find yourself feeling resentful toward your baby, it is time to take a break. Your baby is special and his needs are important, but so are yours. Taking care of yourself will bring balance to your life. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Go see a movie, visit a friend, take a long walk, or just get away for a few hours. Being apart can refresh and revitalize your commitment to having a loving relationship with your baby.

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